ClamScam – one shell of a hoax

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JOEY Skaggs, the master media hoaxer, has struck again — with ClamScam.

Posing as marine biologist Dr. Richard Long, Skaggs staged a rally Tuesday in front of the Japan Society to decry the slaughter of the geoduck, a very real oversized clam with reputed aphrodisiac powers.

The hoaxer convinced Ch. 4, United Press International, the German magazine Der Spiegel and a group of Japanese newspapers that the clam has been nearly eaten into extinction by sex-crazed Japanese sushi lovers who devour the mollusks raw to lift their libidos.

Joey tells PAGE SIX that the geoduck (pronounced gooey duck) is indigenous to Puget Sound in Washington state, but that it is not in any danger of extinction.

"I saw the geoduck for the first time when I was in Seattle in April. Everyone was 'oohing and aahing' over it. That's when I got the idea," he said.

Skaggs, who in real life is a painter and journalism lecturer, last surfaced as the mastermind of the Fat Squad, a group of burly men who could be hired to forcibly restrain chronic dieters from their refrigerators.

He also has posed as a Hungarian biochemist who derived a miracle hormone from roaches.

Another legendary Skaggs sting: cathouses for dogs.

The prankster says he didn't want to stage the hoax from New York because he thought the media might catch on. So he organized a Geoduck Preservation Society with branches in New York and Seattle, had T-shirts made up and sent out press releases.

When D-day arrived, Joey was in Hawaii when the media snapped at his bait.

Ben Farnsworth of Ch. 4 showed up with a camera crew for the event and even managed to locate one of the 8- to 10-pound bivalves — easily recognized by the 2-foot-long appendage that stretches from its shells.

After dutifully reporting the dangers posed to the geoduck, known as *mirugai* in Japan, reporter Ben held up the mollusk by its appendage, asking: "And you wonder why they call it an aphrodisiac?"

Says Skaggs of his coup: "I feel so guilty, I swear I'll never do it again."